

**CONFERENCE ON THE THEME
“TUNISIAN REVOLUTION : ACHIEVEMENTS TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC
TRANSITION AND CHALLENGES OF NEXT STAGE”**

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May I first of all express my honor to meet with you today and extend my warmest thanks to PROF. Stephen Calleya for giving me this opportunity to address this outstanding audience on the : Tunisian Revolution : achievements towards democratic transition and challenges of next stage.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey our appreciation and gratitude to your friendly country for its sympathy, support and inspiring commitment to the Tunisian revolution and people's democratic aspirations. Your efforts and effective role to support us are highly appreciated.

As you know, the 14th of January 2011, unexpectedly popular revolution took place in my country, Tunisia, surprising all the world and appears to be one of the greatest events in modern Arab history.

This peaceful, spontaneous revolution, sustained and remarkably determined, overthrew a system that had been the most entrenched and secure in the whole region. This revolution for freedom and dignity offered to the world an Arab spring and infused a new hope into the conscience of human kind, that yearns for justice and democracy, and holds high the values of freedom and human rights.

This spontaneous revolution, leaderless, free from political or ideological framing and without any foreign support, has indeed succeeded in putting an end to one of the most repressive and authoritarian regime in the region. His lust for power has indeed blocked all the political perspectives, stifled freedom of expression and dashed the hope of youths for a better future, self accomplishment and an effective participation in the economic and social life.

What happened in Tunisia is the natural outgrowth of decade lasting repression and is the expression of the aspiration of its people to live in dignity and freedom.

This historical event embodies a benchmark that has straightened up our country's evolutionary process and helped regain its natural position among the nations and forces attached to the common human values of freedom, democracy, tolerance, equal opportunities and the respect of human rights in all their dimension and scope.

What is happening in Tunisia is watched by all the world, as either a likely model of the transformation or at least as a badly source of revolutionary inspiration; time and future will of course tell us more about the process of this historical event which is continuing to unfold, but some remarks are necessary about the exception and the success story of the Tunisian revolution:

First of all the creativity of the Tunisian people: Tunisia had seemed for long to be an unlikely candidate for revolution due to its stability, progress in the area of economic growth, health, education and women's rights and emancipation; in the same time, the former regime allowed any opposition of any kind, no criticism, no internet freedom including facebook and similar social media. In spite of the climate of total control, the revolution found ways to spread images and stories that proved crucial for its further growth and ultimate success.

The revolution invents the resources that are appropriate for it.

The opposition parties remained unable to direct the revolution that maintained a character of spontaneity and after departure of the former president, emerged again spontaneous coordinating committees. **All the actions are organized and coordinated by networking creativity.**

Second : the dignity of the Tunisian people who no more support the lack of opportunities and

perspectives, the regional disparities, the unemployment, which remained high especially among young people. The pre-revolution climate displays a scene of extreme desperation and exasperation. And it is precisely that scene that is symbolized through the protest suicide of a young man after the police took away from him the last meager resource he had for leading his life.

Third : one of the most striking facts about this revolution is that even after a month of constant activism, it has remained leaderless and peaceful; all deaths and injuries have been result of state violence. Besides sustained leaderless movement and sustained absence of violence, another striking quality of this revolution is the unity of the population and their common request : the right to be respected as a citizen, to enjoy a decent life and to participate in the creation of the system which roles over the persons; these demands are not religious, nor communist, nor nationalist ; it's just liberty, dignity : the slogans of the revolution

Perhaps the lessons to take from this resourceless, spontaneous revolution is:

- * the persistence of very old, basic expectation of citizenship and participation in public and political life.
- * Tunisia demonstrates how a social contract that is based on political repression contains the seeds of its own demise.
- * socio economic problems require, above all, credible and sustainable political solutions.

Having freed itself from all restrictions that hindered its political, economic, social and cultural progress, Tunisia is today at a turning point of its history and on the threshold of a new stage. It yearns for the establishment of a genuine democracy, founded on strong guaranties that consecrate people's sovereignty and the possibility for them to enjoy their rights and to determine their destiny within a political system based on a genuine pluralistic system, a peaceful alternation on power to achieve the objectives of the revolution and to be faithful to the memories of our martyrs.

Yet, the task is by no means an easy one; transition is laborious, painful and risky. The expectations are very high and the challenges are tremendous.

15 months after the revolution, how far has Tunisia changed ?

Tunisians have started to enjoy new freedoms and political rights: freedom of expression and the right to assembly and protest. More than 100 political parties and hundreds of NGO's made of Tunisia a pluralistic country.

Undoubtedly the most important event, was the success of the first free, plural and democratic elections held in Tunisia on 23 october 2011. Political parties were able to campaign for the elections with no harassment or government crackdown. About 80 political parties and dozens of independent lists competed for 217 seats of the Constituent Assembly. An independent commission, the Independent high Authority for the elections, organized the elections, as well as released the official results. The elections were democratic and responded to international standards.

The national constituent where the majority of the political parties in Tunisia are represented, has the mission to draft the constitution but also a legislative role through the promulgation of law and the control of the government.

The appointed first coalition government, which is a revolutionary feat in itself, is ushering in a new era of reforms and reconstruction, persuing the efforts of its predecessor government which in addition to the progress underscored in the political field, has achieved many reforms involving various sectors and fields, specially related to the protection of human rights and public freedom as the general amnesty to the benefit of all the political prisoners under the former regime together with the dissolution of the political police. He has also set up several and independent bodies aimed at achieving the objective of the revolution, investigating corruption and abuses by the previous regime.

He has also signed several international conventions that the previous regime has persistently refused to endorse; these include but not limited to: the optional protocol on political rights and civil liberties, the accession of Tunisia to the Rome statue of the International criminal court, the optional protocol to UN Convention against torture...

Within the same context, the reforms of the judiciary system and its upgrading with regards to files

related to combating corruption, to enhance transparency and good governance, are launched

Another achievement is about the Tunisian Administration which secured the continuity of the state through keeping ordinary and normal work.

Also one of the key gains of the Tunisian revolution is freedom of the media and expression after decades of tight control on both state and private media. Yet, the path to liberate it totally, is a long and a thorny one and is closely linked to the nature of the democratic transition in Tunisia.

In general, we can say that in political field, many achievements are done and probably the priciest fruits of the Tunisian revolution are actually the pluralistic society, the democratic election of October 2011 and the establishment of the culture of protest (as the wall of fear fell down, and violent police practices started to ease, unhappy citizens resorted to the street whenever they feel that the transition to democracy is in danger).

Tunisia is now at a pivotal moment, looking forward to a brighter future and determined to join the concert of the free world. Yet, it is fully aware of the thorny situation and has to face, in addition to political transition challenges, issues related to the difficult social and economic situation resulting from the post revolutionary conjuncture and the negative repercussions that entailed economy.

Don't forget that at the outset, the revolution started from the country's marginalized and poor interior regions as a social movement against corruption, seeking equal economic opportunities, and chanting employment, freedom and national dignity

Within this context, Tunisia is facing structural, socio-economic challenges, which the country needs to overcome in order to preserve its stability. Firstly, youth unemployment, which has reached a historic high level estimated 30% among the 20-24 year-old, must be reduced quickly in order to give fresh hope to the younger generation of Tunisians.

Secondly, regional economic and social disparities which is at the core of the social unrest in many cities in southern and western region of Tunisia, and have to be significantly reduced by adopting a policy leading to a well distributed socio-economic impact on the various regions and to a better integration of the isolated rural areas into the national and regional economic network.

Tunisia must also overcome a critical situation in the short term. The uncertainties arising from the transition period had a negative impact on the Tunisian economy, with a coast estimated at 5% of the country's GDP.

Growth forecasts are low, the state budget and the trade balance are negatively affected, and foreign direct investment has slowed down, in addition to increasing social demands, decline of the production capacity, investor's confidence, decline of the industry and tourism sector.

In its endeavors to chart a new path for growth, economic opportunity and empowerment, Tunisia will build on the revolution's achievements and break for past practices to anchor transparency, social accountability and citizen participation. To move forward, Tunisia has to link economic performance to the quality of governance, to create rule of law mechanisms to insure accountability and transparency.

No doubt, Tunisia is endowed with assets to achieve its goals and to carry out the democratic transition and the economic and social development. These are founded on a strong popular will, a large social homogeneity and a solid determination to succeed in this democratic experience as well as economic, social and geographical outstanding comparative advantages.

Tunisia remains, nevertheless, in an urgent need of continuous support and effective solidarity from the international community to succeed in the democratic transition endeavors and to avoid recession that often accompanies popular revolution.

I would like to seize this opportunity to convey Tunisian's special thanks to all its partners which didn't refrain from showing their support to this transitional process and to Tunisia's economic revival.

Tunisia's success will be a victory for the values of freedom and democracy in our part of the world and will break with the myth of "Arab exception" which perpetuates inaction and dictatorship by arguing that the Arab and Muslim world are culturally immune to emancipative values.

Tunisia's success will also mean success and victory of the universal values of democracy, good governance and human rights.

It is an unprecedented opportunity for our partners to have for the first time a truly democratic partner in our part of the world sharing the same values.

Tunisia has all credentials for a successful transition: its reformist and modernist history, its traditional openness, a highly educated population, a well established middle class, a high degree of women emancipation and a considerable openness to the outside world. Additionally, the competitiveness of the Tunisian economy, combined with the country's strategic position at the heart of the Mediterranean, gives Tunisia the best chances to become a major economic hub. Thanks to the achievements of the Tunisian revolution, these intrinsic strengths are today irreversibly anchored deeper, than ever, in the Tunisian self conception.

The chances of success in Tunisia are greater than in any other country. Moreover the small size of Tunisia and its generally solid fundamentals will make any investment in our country yield strong dividends with a high cost benefit ratio.

The world is attentive to the Tunisian's experience that is perceived as an example, a model, and a success story of peaceful revolution and a democratic transition, to follow in other countries if it succeeds. But, if there is a failure, it will be the failure of the values of democracy all over the world. So this is not only a Tunisian challenge, but I think it is also the international community's challenge to accompany its reform process.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that 15 months are not enough to replace decades of uninterrupted dictatorship by a genuine democracy, even though Tunisian people are vigilant, have high ambitions but also high hopes on international solidarity to remain the success story of the region.

Thank you for your attention